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NOT long ſince, I met at St. James's coffee-houſe an old acquaintance of mine, ſir Harry Prigg; who having been long ruſticated, and much altered, I ſhould never have recollected, had it not been for the information of a fine old coat, in which I remembered him to have made a figure about town many years ago. After the uſual civilities had paſſed between us, amongſt many other queſtions, he aſked me when I had ſeen our old ſchool-fellow, ſir John Jolly.* I anſwered, that I had laſt ſummer ſpent ſome days with him at his country ſeat, in a manner which would have been highly agreeable to a perſon of a more faſhionable turn, but was to me rather fatiguing from it's exceſs of gaiety and hoſpitality, which, according to my unpolite taſte, were by no means conſiſtent with the ſoft and ſerious pleaſures

* See Number 153.

ſures of a rural retirement. He ſaid, he perfectly agreed with me in my ſentiments, and paſſed his time in the country in conformity to them: his manner of life, he was ſure, would exactly ſuit me, and obligingly begged I would make the experiment, adding, that he ſhould go down in a few days, and would carry me with him in his chariot. I accepted his invitation, not ſo much out of inclination, as curioſity to ſee a new ſcene of country life, formed on principles ſo oppoſite to what I had before experienced, and promiſed to attend him at the time appointed.

But firſt it will be proper to give ſome account of the birth, parentage, and education of my friend. He came young to his title, and a ſmall eſtate, and was ſoon after ſent to the univerſity; where his title abſurdly giving him the rank of nobility, and his eſtate, though ſmall, an allowance ſufficient to ſupport that rank at that place, he there contracted an affectation of grandeur, and a pert kind of ſelf-importance, which he has ever ſince retained, and which neither poverty nor ſolitude has yet been able to conquer. Having in two or three years acquired the uſual advantages of that ſort of education, ſuch as the arts of ſporting, toaſting, billiards and coachmanſhip, he came to London, entered into the gay world, and had addreſs and qualifications ſufficient to introduce himſelf into what he ſtill calls the beſt company; that is, the company of ſmarts, bucks, jockeys and gameſters. Nor was he deficient in point of gallantry; for he ſoon commenced an intrigue with the ſiſter of one of theſe his friends. Whether his intentions were at firſt honourable, is not perfectly clear; but he was quickly obliged to declare them ſo, being acquainted, that a lady of her rank was not to be trifled with, and that he muſt either fight or marry; the latter of which he courageouſly choſe, as being the moſt daring action of the two. This lady had more gentility than beauty, more beauty than underſtanding, more underſtanding than fortune, and a fortune about equal to her reputation. She was tall and well-ſhaped, carried her head very high, and being the younger daughter of the younger ſon of the firſt couſin of an Iriſh baron, looked upon herſelf as a woman of quality. In a little time ſir Harry heartily hated her for compelling him to marry; and ſhe no leſs deſpiſed him for being compelled:

compelled: ſo that finding little happineſs at home, they were obliged to ſeek it abroad at plays and routs, operas and gaming-tables, at no ſmall expence. This could not continue long; ſo that before one winter was at an end, they diſcovered that the town-air would not agree with them, and ſo retired to their country ſeat, about forty miles from London; whither I ſhall now conduct my reader.

On the morning appointed, I attended early at their lodgings in town, where I found the poſt-chariot at the door, and my friend ſtanding by it, with a long whip in his hand, ready to mount the box; ſaying at the ſame time, that coachmen were ſuch inſolent and expenſive raſcals, there was no keeping them, and that therefore he always choſe to be his own. In the parlour ſat my lady, and colonel Macſhean, a gentleman who had long been very intimate with ſir Harry, and not leſs ſo with her ladyſhip; and in the paſſage ſtood her Frenchwoman, in a ſack and long ruffles, with her arms full of band-boxes and bundles; which were no ſooner diſpoſed of in various parts of the chariot, than my lady and myſelf, with her woman on a low ſtool at our feet, were ſtuffed into the little room that was left. Sir Harry mounted the box, his valet de chambre rode by, and a ſniveling footboy climbed up behind. Thus the whole family, with their baggage, and myſelf into the bargain, were conveyed without the expence of either a ſtage coach or a waggon.

Nothing paſſed during our journey worth relating. Her ladyſhip ſpoke little, and that little was only complaints of her bad nerves, and ill ſtate of health; to which, having no expectation of a fee, I paid little attention. They both declared, that nobody but a carrier could dine at an inn, wherefore they never ſtopped on the road: ſo with the aſſiſtance of a freſh pair of horſes, that had come twenty miles that morning without a bait, about ſun-ſet we arrived at our journey's end. The colonel got there before us, having rode poſt: for ſir Harry frequently declared to us both, that, though his friends were welcome, he never entertained their horſes; that it was not the faſhion of that country; neither my lord **, nor the duke of ***, nor himſelf did it.

It was not long before the dinner made it's appearance; which was ſo very genteel, that had it not been rendered uneatable by a bad affectation of French cookery, it would not have been half ſufficient, after ſo many miles travelling, and ſo long faſting. At the concluſion we had meed, which paſſed for tokay, and elder wine, which ſir Harry ſwore was the beſt burgundy in England, and that he himſelf had imported it, in conjunction with a noble lord in the neighbourhood. Over a glaſs of this, the cloth being removed, he informed us, "that when "the ſmoke of London, and the bad hours incident to "keeping good company, would no longer agree with "his own or his wife's conſtitution, he had determined "to ſeek health and quiet in an elegant retirement. He "had been offered indeed a ſeat in parliament, and a "conſiderable employment; but his crazy conſtitution "would not permit him to accept of the one, nor his "ſound principles of the other. Retirement was their "object; therefore all they dreaded was the horrible "irruptions of a country neighbourhood; but this they "had happily prevented. That indeed on their firſt coming, every family within ten miles round, tormented "them with their impertinent viſits; but they returned "none, affronted them all, and ſo got rid of them. "Don't you think we did right, my dear? turning to "his wife." "I think, anſwered ſhe, in a ſurly and "dejected voice, that it is better to forget the uſe of one's "tongue, than to converſe with ſquires wives, and parſons daughters." "You are right, madam, added "the colonel, with an oath and a loud laugh; for what "can one learn in ſuch damned company?" "Tomorrow, ſays my friend, addreſſing himſelf to me, you "ſhall ſee that we want no company, and that we can "ſufficiently amuſe ourſelves with building and planting, "with improvements and alterations, which I dare ſay "will be honoured with your approbation."

Accordingly the next morning, as ſoon as breakfaſt was finiſhed, my lady and the colonel retired into her dreſſing room to cribbage, and ſir Harry and myſelf to reconnoitre the place. The houſe ſtands at the end of a dirty village, and cloſe by it are a few tame deer, impounded in an orchard, to which he gives the pompous title of a park. Behind is a fen, which he calls a piece of water, and before it a gooſe-common, on which he beſtows

beſtows the name of a lawn. It was built in that deplorable æra of Engliſh architecture, which introduced high doors, long windows, ſmall rooms, and corner chimneys; and of gardening, which projected gravel walks, clipt yews, and ſtrait-lined avenues, with a profuſion of brick walls, iron paliſado's and leaden images. But all theſe defects and many others, he has now corrected by a judicious application of modern taſte. His doors are ſo reduced, you cannot enter with your hat on; and his windows ſo contracted, that you have ſcarce light enough to find it, if you pull it off. In the midſt of the front, one large bow-window is ſtuck on, reſembling a piece of whited-brown paper plaiſtered on a broken noſe; and a great room is added behind to dine in, which, was it ever inhabited, would make all the little ones appear ſtill leſs: but having never yet been finiſhed, for want both of caſh and credit, it remains at preſent only a repoſitory for broken china, a pair of backgammon tables, and the children's play-things. His brick walls are converted into chimneys and ovens, and his yew-trees ſupply them with faggots: his iron-work is ſold to the blackſmiths, and his heathen gods to the plumber, for the pious uſe of covering the pariſh church: his gravel walks are ſown with graſs; and he frequently repeats that frugal, yet genteel maxim, that ſheep are the beſt gardiners. His horſe-pond, being made ſerpentine, is become uſeleſs, leſt it ſhould be trod up; and his fences, being all Chineſe, are no fences at all; the horſes leaping over, and the hogs walking under them at their pleaſure. The tranſplanted avenue is expiring in leafleſs platoons; the kitchen-garden, for conveniency, is removed two furlongs from the houſe; and the kitchen itſelf unjuſtly turned out of doors, for ſmelling of victuals; a crime of which it has ever been acquitted by the voice of the whole country.

When our ſurvey was finiſhed, our amuſements were all at an end; for within doors the pleaſures both of ſociety and ſolitude were equally wanting. Of our converſation I have given a ſpecimen; and books there were none, except a ſmall one containing tunes for the French-horn, belonging to ſir Harry, and the third volume of Peregrine Pickle, and a methodiſt prayer-book, the property of her ladyſhip. I began now to wiſh for a little of my friend ſir John's hoſpitality, of which there was

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